

CLAIMS

1. A gaming system comprising:

5                   at least one gaming device configured to allow a player to play a game, said  
gaming device further configured to issue an award credit to said player  
upon a winning game event; and  
a prize station having at least one prize, said prize station configured to  
award a prize to said player according to the award credits associated with  
10                   said player.

2. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device and said prize  
station are integrated into a single unit.

15                   3. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station is integrated into a  
second gaming device.

20                   4. The gaming system of claim 1, further comprising a validation device said  
validation device configured to validate each said award credit associated with  
said player before said prize is awarded.

5. The gaming system of claim 1, further comprising a validation device operatively coupled for communication with said gaming device and said prize station, said validation device configured to validate each said award credit associated with said player before said prize is awarded.

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6. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station further comprises a vault to house said prize.

7. The gaming system of claim 6, wherein said prize is visible to said player.

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8. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station is further configured to award said prize via an attendant.

9. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station is further configured

15 to award said prize automatically without an attendant.

10. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station further comprises a vault housing said prize and having a door, said door secured by a latch, said prize station further configured to release said latch when said prize is awarded to said

20 player.

11. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize is delivered to said player via a courier service.

12. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said award credit is not redeemable for  
5 cash by said prize station.

13. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said award credit is not redeemable for cash by said gaming device.

10 14. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station comprises a computer terminal having input means to receive said prize award credit from said player and a display device to display said prize.

15 15. The gaming system of claim 14, wherein said computer terminal is further coupled to a local area network.

16. The gaming system of claim 14, wherein said computer terminal is further coupled to a wide area network.

20 17. The gaming system of claim 16, wherein said wide area network comprises the global information network, one of said prizes suitable for redemption via an online merchant connected to said global information network.

18. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device issues said award credit to said player via a prize bearing instrument.

5     19. The gaming system of claim 18, wherein said prize bearing instrument is configured to associate at least one award credit with said player

20. The gaming system of claim 18, wherein said prize bearing instrument comprises a printed voucher.

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21. The gaming system of claim 18, wherein said prize bearing instrument comprises a magnetic stripe card.

22. The gaming system of claim 18, wherein said prize bearing instrument

15     comprises a smart card.

23. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein a second award credit is issued to said player in response to an activity unrelated to the play of said gaming device.

20     24. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein a second award credit is issued to said player to promote said player to play said gaming device.

25. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station comprises a plurality of prizes associated therewith.

26. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said gaming device issues said award credit to said player via a prize bearing instrument, said prize bearing instrument configured to associate said award credit with said player.

27. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said prize bearing instrument is further configured to associate at least one additional award credit with said player.

28. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said gaming device is further configured to:

receive said prize bearing instrument as a first prize bearing instrument;

determine the number of previous award credits associated with said player according to said first prize bearing instrument; and

issue at least one additional award credit to said player upon an additional winning event.

29. The gaming system of claim 28, wherein said gaming device is further configured to issue a second prize bearing instrument to said player, said second

prize bearing instrument configured to associate said previous award credits and said additional award credits with said player.

30. The gaming system of claim 29, wherein said gaming device is further  
5 configured to repeat said acts of claim 28 with respect to said second prize bearing instrument.

31. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said prize center is further configured

to

10 receive at least one prize bearing instruments as a redeemable prize bearing instrument; and  
determine the number of redeemable award credits associated with said player according to said redeemable bearing instrument.

15 32. The gaming system of claim 31, wherein said prize center is further configured to offer a prize selection from said plurality of prizes according to said number of redeemable award credits, said prize center further configured to award a redeemed prize according to said prize selection.

20 33. The gaming system of claim 32, wherein said prize center is further configured to determine the number of remaining award credits from said redeemable award credits after said redeemed prize is awarded to said player, said prize center further

configured to issue a third prize bearing instrument configured to associate said remaining award credits with said player.

34. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein a second award credit is issued to  
5 said player in response to an activity unrelated to the play of said gaming device,  
said second award credit issued via a second prize bearing instrument.

35. The gaming system of claim 34, wherein said gaming device is further  
configured to:

10 receive said prize bearing instrument issued by said gaming device as a first  
prize bearing instrument;  
receive said second prize bearing instrument; and  
determine the number of previous award credits associated with said player  
according to said first prize bearing instrument and said second prize  
15 bearing instrument.

36. The gaming system of claim 35, wherein said gaming device is further  
configured to: issue at least one additional award credit to said player upon an  
additional winning event.

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37. The gaming system of claim 36, wherein said gaming device is further  
configured to issue a third prize bearing instrument to said player, said third prize

bearing instrument configured to associate said previous award credits and said additional award credits with said player.

38. The gaming system of claim 37, wherein said prize center is further configured

5 to

receive said first, second or third prize bearing instruments as a redeemable prize bearing instrument; and

determine the number of redeemable award credits associated with said player according to said redeemable bearing instrument.

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39. The gaming system of claim 38, wherein said prize center is further configured to offer a prize selection from said plurality of prizes according to said number of redeemable award credits, said prize center further configured to award a redeemed prize to said prize selection.

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40. The gaming system of claim 39, wherein said prize center is further configured to determine the number of remaining award credits from said redeemable award credits after said redeemed prize is awarded to said player, said prize center further configured to issue a fourth prize bearing instrument configured to associate said remaining award credits with said player.

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41. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said gaming device is further configured to:

receive a plurality of prize bearing instruments from said player;

determine an aggregate number of previous award credits associated with

5 said player according to each said prize bearing instrument received; and

issue at least one additional award credit to said player upon an additional

winning event.

42. The gaming system of claim 41, wherein said gaming device is further

10 configured to issue a second prize bearing instrument to said player, said second

prize bearing instrument configured to associate said aggregate number of

previous award credits and said additional award credits with said player.

43. The gaming system of claim 42, wherein said gaming device is further

15 configured to repeat said acts of claim 41 with respect to said second prize bearing

instrument.

44. The gaming system of claim 43, wherein said prize center is further configured

to

20 receive said first or second prize bearing instruments as a redeemable prize

bearing instrument; and

determine the number of redeemable award credits associated with said player according to said redeemable bearing instrument.

45. The gaming system of claim 44, wherein said prize center is further configured  
5 to offer a prize selection from said plurality of prizes according to said number of  
redeemable award credits, said prize center further configured to award a  
redeemed prize according to said prize selection.

46. The gaming system of claim 45, wherein said prize center is further configured  
10 to determine the number of remaining award credits from said redeemable award  
credits after said redeemed prize is awarded to said player, said prize center further  
configured to issue a third prize bearing instrument configured to associate said  
remaining award credits with said player.

15 47. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said gaming device is further  
configured to:

receive a plurality of prize bearing instruments from said player; and  
determine an aggregate number of previous award credits associated with  
said player according to each said prize bearing instrument received to  
20 identify a number of redeemable award credits.

48. The gaming system of claim 47, wherein said prize center is further configured to offer a prize selection from said plurality of prizes according to said number of redeemable award credits, said prize center further configured to award a redeemed prize according to said prize selection.

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49. The gaming system of claim 48, wherein said prize center is further configured to determine the number of remaining award credits from said redeemable award credits after said redeemed prize is awarded to said player, said prize center further configured to issue a third prize bearing instrument configured to associate said 10 remaining award credits with said player.

50. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said prize bearing instrument further comprises a user readable code suitable for manual entry to said prize station by said player.

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51. The gaming system of claim 26, wherein said prize bearing instrument is further configured to associate, with said player, at least one prize which has been awarded to said player.

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52. The gaming system of claim 51, wherein said gaming device is further configured to award a bonus award credit to said player when said player is associated with a predetermined (subset/collection) of prizes.

53. The gaming system of claim 52, wherein said prize station further comprises at least one bonus prize, said prize station further configured to award said bonus prize to said player according to the bonus award credits associated with said player.

54. The gaming system of claim 51, wherein said prize station is further configured to award a bonus award credit to said player when said player is associated with a predetermined (subset/collection) of prizes.

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55. The gaming system of claim 54, wherein said prize station further comprises at least one bonus prize, said prize station further configured to award said bonus prize to said player according to the bonus award credits associated with said player.

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56. The gaming system of claim 25 further comprising a monitoring device, said monitoring device configured to monitor the status of each said prize.

20 57. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device comprises a slot machine.

58. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device comprises a video poker machine.

59. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device comprises a video lottery device.

60. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device comprises a casino table game.

10 61. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said winning game result arises from a random event in the game.

62. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said winning game result arises from a predetermined game result allocated from a finite pool of game play results.

15 63. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming device is further configured to issue game credits to said player upon game events, said prize station further configured to award a prize according to game credits associated with said player.

64. The gaming system of claim 63, wherein said gaming device is further configured to issue game credits to said player when said player presents monies to said gaming device.

5 65. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station is further configured to award a prize according to monies presented by the player to the prize station.

10 66. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said gaming system comprises a plurality of gaming devices, each configured to allow a player to play a game and issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event, said prize station configured to award a prize to said player according to the award credits earned by said player on said plurality of gaming devices.

15 67. The gaming system of claim 66, wherein said prize station is configured to award a prize to said player only when said player has earned an award credit on each of a predetermined subset of said plurality of gaming devices.

20 68. The gaming system of claim 1, wherein said prize station comprises a plurality of prizes and a plurality of prize levels, each prize associated with one of said prize levels.

69. The gaming system of claim 68, wherein said award credits associated with said player may be accumulated together to redeem a prize associated with said prize levels.

5 70. A gaming device configured to allow a player to play a game, said gaming device further configured to issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event.

10 71. The gaming device of claim 70, wherein said gaming device is configured to issue said award credit to said player via a prize bearing instrument, said prize bearing instrument configured to associate said award credit with said player.

15 52. The gaming device of claim 71, wherein said gaming device is further configured to:

receive said prize bearing instrument as a first prize bearing instrument;  
determine the number of previous award credits associated with said player according to said first prize bearing instrument; and  
issue at least one additional award credit to said player upon an additional winning event.

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73. The gaming device of claim 72, wherein said gaming device is further configured to issue a second prize bearing instrument to said player, said second

prize bearing instrument configured to associate said previous award credits and said additional award credits with said player.

74. The gaming device of claim 73, wherein said gaming device is further  
5 configured to repeat said acts of claim 72 with respect to said second prize bearing instrument.

75. The gaming system of claim 70 wherein said winning game result arises from a random event in the game.

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76. The gaming system of claim 70 wherein said winning game result arises from a predetermined game result allocated from a finite pool of game play results.

77. The gaming system of claim 70, wherein said gaming device includes a  
15 primary game and a secondary game, said game winning result arising from the primary game.

78. The gaming system of claim 70, wherein said gaming device includes a  
primary game and a secondary game, said game winning result arising from the  
20 secondary game.

79. The gaming system of claim 70, wherein said gaming device includes a primary game and a secondary investment bonus game, said game winning result arising from the primary game.

5 80. The gaming system of claim 79, wherein said award credits are associated with said secondary investment bonus game.

81. A method for maintaining a game state of a player of a gaming device, said gaming device configured to issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event, said method comprising:

associating an award credit with the player upon a winning game event; and recording the user's associated award credits upon said user's termination of play of the gaming device.

15 82. The method of claim 81, wherein said recording is carried out on a printer ticket.

83. The method of claim 81, wherein said recording is carried out on a computer readable medium.

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84. The method of claim 81, wherein said recording is carried out on a server computer.

85. The method of claim 81, further comprising determining the player's previously stored award credits upon the player's reinitiation of game play of the gaming device.

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86. The method of claim 85, further comprising:

associating additional award credit with the player upon a winning game event;

aggregating said additional award credits with the previously stored credits;

10 and

storing said additional award credits with the previously stored credits upon said user's termination of play of the gaming device.

87. The method of claim 81, further comprising providing a primary game and a

15 secondary game, said award credits issued pursuant to said secondary game.

88. The method of claim 81, wherein said award credit is a game piece.

89. A gaming device configured to allow a player to play a game, said gaming

20 device further configured to issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event, said gaming device further configured to issue said award credit to said player via a information storage medium, said information storage medium

configured to associate said award credit with said player, said gaming device further configured to:

receive said information storage medium as a first prize bearing instrument;

determine the number of previous award credits associated with said player

5 according to said first prize bearing instrument; and

issue at least one additional award credit to said player upon an additional winning event.

90. A gaming system comprising:

10 a plurality of gaming devices, each configured to allow a player to play a game, each said gaming device further configured to issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event; and

a prize station having at least one prize, said prize station configured to award a prize to said player according to the award credits associated with

15 said player when said player has earned an award credit on each of a predetermined subset of said plurality of gaming devices.

91. A gaming system comprising:

20 a plurality of banks of gaming devices, each gaming device configured to allow a player to play a game, each said gaming device further configured to issue an award credit to said player upon a winning game event; and

a prize station having at least one prize, said prize station configured to award a prize to said player according to the award credits associated with said player when said player has earned an award credit on each of a predetermined subset of said plurality of banks of gaming devices.